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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving social skills while incorporating cooperative learning in the curriculum. The targeted population consisted of third grade students in a regular classroom and fifth grade students in physical education classes at two different elementary schools in the same district. The schools were located in a predominately upper class Jewish and Roman Catholic community in the Midwest. The lack of social skills was documented with student and teacher surveys, behavior checklists, and anecdotal records. Analysis of probable cause indicated that there was a considerable lack of social skills among elementary students. This lack of social skills adversely affected student achievement and development of positive relationships among peers. Review of the research indicated that social skills were not part of the classroom curriculum. After analysis of the problem setting, the following solution strategies were implemented: teaching of social skills, creating a cooperative classroom through the use of cooperative learning activities, teaching of conflict resolution techniques, instituting open meetings, and implementing classroom expectations that foster a caring classroom. The program included community building activities, social skills T-charts, and role playing. Post intervention data indicated that the intervention had a positive impact on peer relationships and the students' ability to work cooperatively in groups. However, it is recommended that a social skills program be implemented school wide. (Contains 37 references and 10 tables of data. Appendixes contain staff and student surveys, a teacher checklist, student social skills goals, instructions for negotiating, and a worksheet for student social skill reflection.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING THE SOCIAL SKILLS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Mary Ellen Barr
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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & SkyLight Professional Development

Field-Based Masters Program

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving social skills while incorporating cooperative learning in the curriculum. The targeted population consisted of third grade students in a regular classroom and fifth grade students in physical education classes at two different elementary schools in the same district. The schools were located in a predominately upper class Jewish and Roman Catholic community in the Mid west. The lack of social skills was documented with student and teacher surveys, behavior checklists, and anecdotal records.

Analysis of probable cause indicated that there was a considerable lack of social skills among elementary students. This lack of social skills adversely affected student achievement and development of positive relationships among peers. Review of the research indicated that social skills were not part of the classroom curriculum.

After analysis of the problem setting, the following solution strategies were implemented: teaching of social skills, creating a cooperative classroom through the use of cooperative learning activities, teaching of conflict resolution techniques, instituting open meetings, and implementing classroom expectations that foster a caring classroom. The program included community building activities, social skills T-charts, and role playing.

Post intervention data indicated that the intervention had a positive impact on peer relationships and the students' ability to work cooperatively in groups. However, it is recommended that a social skills program be implemented school wide.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted third grade general education class and the fifth grade physical education classes exhibit a lack of social skills that interferes with the development of positive relationships and their ability to work cooperatively in groups. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes teacher and student surveys, behavior checklists and teacher observation journals.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research project takes place in two schools in the same elementary school district. Site A and site B are both elementary schools serving grades one through five. The school district is a suburb of a major metropolitan area. The information in the following tables was derived from the 1999 school report cards.

Table 1 represents the racial/ethnic background and the total enrollments of both sites as of September 30, 1998. Site A and site B are primarily White/non-Hispanic, as is the district. The total enrollment at site B is 15% higher than at site A.

Table 1

Racial/Ethnic Characteristics and Total Enrollment

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ P Islander	Native American	Total Enrollment
Site A	90.6%	0.5%	1.2%	7.7%	0.0%	651
Site B	90.1%	1.1%	1.8%	6.9%	0.2%	566
District	89.7%	1.0%	1.7%	7.6%	0.1%	3,635

Table 2 represents low-income and limited-English proficient students. Low-income students are from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. Limited-English-proficient students are those found to be eligible for bilingual education. The percentage of low-income students at both sites is below the district level. Site A has a higher percentage of limited English proficient students than site B. Both sites have a higher percentage than the district.

Table 2

Low-Income and Limited-English-Proficient Students

	Low-Income	Limited-English-Proficient
Site A	0.3%	6.3%
Site B	0.4%	4.1%
District	1.4%	3.7%

Table 3 represents attendance, mobility, and chronic truancy for both elementary schools and the district. A perfect attendance rate of 100% means that all students attended school every day. The student mobility rate is based on the number of students who enroll in or leave a school during the school year. Students may be counted more than once in this category. Chronic truants are students who were absent from school without valid cause for 10% or more of the last 180 school days.

The attendance rates at both schools are very high and the chronic truancy rates are non-existent. These rates are also comparable to the district rate. The mobility rate at site A is slightly higher than site B. Site A has a higher mobility rate than the district, whereas site B is lower than the district rate.

Table 3

Attendance, Mobility and Chronic Truancy

	Attendance	Mobility	Chronic Truancy	Number of Chronic Truants
Site A	95.8%	5.3%	0.0%	0
Site B	95.7%	4.7%	0.0%	0
District	95.4%	5.0%	0.0%	0

Site A has 57 staff members, 35 are certified staff and 21 are support staff. The ethnicity is 98% White/non-Hispanic. Ninety-three percent of the staff are female and 7% are male. The average experience level of the teachers is 13.5 years, and 24 of the teachers have masters degrees or above. The site has one principal.

Site A was renovated during the summer of 1999. It now has 23 classrooms, 22 of which are in use. Eight offices, with adequate space for small group instruction, are utilized by specialists in learning disabilities, social work, reading, math, speech and language, and bilingual education. The common areas available to all students through fixed or flexible scheduling include: multipurpose room, gymnasium, learning center, art room, music room, math lab and computer lab. The multipurpose room, located on the main floor of this two story building, is used primarily for assemblies, for a cafeteria, and for physical education. Adjoining the multipurpose room is a stage area. A movable wall between the multipurpose room and the stage area allows space for an audience to enjoy school musicals, plays and cultural arts performances. The office contains a receiving area, the principal's office, a conference room, the psychologist's office, and the nurse's office.

The targeted general education third grade at site A is a self-contained class consisting of 25 students. Within the classroom there are students with learning disabilities, students learning English as a second language, and students with

speech and language impairments. These students are serviced in separate pull-out programs. Supplemental math instruction for at-risk students is provided one day a week for 30 minutes, and instruction for at-risk reading students is provided three days a week for 30 minutes each day. The daily schedule consists of 60 minutes devoted to teaching mathematics, 45 minutes to science or social studies, and 195 minutes to language arts. All third grade students receive music and art instruction once a week for 45 minutes.

Site A students receive physical education five days a week for 30 minutes. Instruction incorporates critical thinking and problem solving activities, lifelong skills and games, integration with the curriculum and health and fitness related subject matter. The student teacher ratio is 21:1, and two classes share the gym during an instructional period. The targeted fifth grade physical education class consists of 42 students. This population includes children with physical challenges and learning disabilities.

Students at site A have access to a computer lab and library resource center. Class scheduling is flexible to allow for curriculum integration. There are four 40 minute lunch periods that include a 20 minute recess. A daily hot lunch program is available. Fourth and fifth grade extra curricular activities include: after school sports, student council, safety patrol, band, orchestra, and chorus.

Site B has 80 staff members, 50 are certified staff and 30 are support staff. The ethnicity is 100% White/non-Hispanic. Eighty-four percent of the staff are female and 16% are male. The average experience level of the teachers is 16 years and 19 of the teachers have masters degrees or above. The site has one principal.

The facility of Site B was newly renovated in the Fall of 1995. There are 26 general education classrooms, and 12 resource classrooms including learning disabled, speech/language and behavior disorder. There are also classrooms which

foster an excellent learning environment in the area of specials. These specials classrooms include art, music, computer lab, and one learning center. The physical education classes have the use of two gymnasiums and one mat room with a rock climbing wall. The large gymnasium doubles as a lunch room, while the small gymnasium has a stage with a state of the art sound system for cultural events and school performances. The main office consists of one principal's office, two secretarial centers, a full-time staffed nurse's office, two social worker offices, and one conference room.

The targeted students at site B are in the fifth grade physical education class for 30 minutes each day. The class consists of students with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, and students who are bilingual. The student teacher ratio is 26:1, and three classes share two gyms during an instructional period.

Students at site B rotate to five different special subject areas throughout the school year. These subject areas include: art, music, and computers. These special areas are rotated every twelve weeks. There are three 40 minute lunch periods. A hot lunch program is provided with two menu options. Students participate in outdoor recess as part of their lunch period when weather permits.

At site B there are many extracurricular activities in which students can be involved. These activities include band, orchestra, chorus, and after school clubs. Clubs are held for one hour and two late buses are provided for transportation home. Clubs that are offered on a consistent basis are: pottery, photography, yearbook, creative writing, country line dancing, jogging, adventure education, and battle of the books.

Since the two sites are in the same district, they share many of the same educational programs. All students complete Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) and human sexuality education programs. Enrichment instruction is provided

at all grade levels. Bilingual classes are available on an as needed basis. Both sites in this community have families from different ethnic backgrounds.

The Surrounding Community

Sites A and B are located in the Midwest region of the state. It is predominately an upper class Jewish and Roman Catholic community. The median family income according to the 1990 census is $56,011 and the median home value is $163,600. The district was formed in 1947. Site A is 20 years old and site B is 27 years old. The district serves students in grades K-8 from two distinct communities and portions of four surrounding communities. There are four elementary schools (1-5), two middle schools (6-8), and one early childhood/kindergarten center.

The district administration includes one superintendent of schools, one assistant superintendent for instruction, one assistant superintendent for administrative services, and one assistant superintendent for business. Other administrative staff include coordinator of student services, director of facilities and transportation, and principal on assignment. The average salary for administrators is $101,666, and the administrator-pupil ratio is 259.6:1.

The school board consists of elected officials that reside in the district. Elections are held in April, however, newly elected officials are not seated until November. Board members are elected to four year terms with elections for three or four seats occurring every two years. There is no limit to the number of years an elected official can serve on the school board.

The district average operating expenditure per pupil is $5,858. This is well below the state cost of $6,682. Due to the high achievement of students on the 1997 Illinois Standards Achievement Test, all schools in this district have received a two year waiver of state mandated school improvement plans and quality assurance visits.

Due to an increase in the community's population and the passing of the 1997

referendum, the district has gone through a reconfiguration process. An additional elementary and middle school were built during the summer of 1999. This required the restructuring of boundaries to accommodate the growth in the school district. Table 4 indicates the population growth in the surrounding communities since 1970. Due to the increase in population in this community, there is a higher probability that more students will be entering the schools with underdeveloped social skills.

Table 4

Historic Population

Year	Population
1970	11,860 (Census)
1980	22,230 (Census)
1985	26,168 (Special Census)
1988	32,337 (Special Census)
1990	36,427 (Census)
1994	40,273 (Special Census)
1998	42,016 (estimate)

National Context of Problem

In the national educational system today, many teachers are concerned with the lack of social skills displayed by their students. This lack of social skills is causing a breakdown in positive relationships among students at all grade levels. It is also deterring students from working cooperatively with one another. According to Hundert (1995), "A sizable portion of a generation of children is growing up without adequately developed interpersonal skills for coping with others, dealing with stress, or finding personal contentment" (p. ix). He further states, "There is no sign that aggression in childhood is lessening---in fact, it appears to be increasing" (Hundert, 1995, p. 213).

All of our lives, we search for ways to satisfy our needs for love, belonging, caring, sharing, and cooperation. If a student feels no sense of belonging in

> school, no sense of being involved in caring and concern, that child will pay little attention to academic subjects. Instead, he or she will engage in a desperate search for friendship, for acceptance. The child may become a behavioral problem, in the hope of attracting attention. (Glasser as cited in Burke, 1992, p. xvi)

The federal law requiring children to attend school says that, "the purpose of education is to prepare children for responsible citizenship" (Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 1997, p. ix). Learning math, reading and writing will not prepare children for responsible citizenship if they "lack self-discipline, judgment, social interest, the ability to make good choices and the sense of responsibility that enables them to act effectively in life" (Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 1997, p. ix).

According to Nelsen, Lott and Glenn (1997), students who are weak in social skills are at a high risk for many of the problems facing youth today, such as drug abuse, teen pregnancy, suicide, delinquency and gang involvement. Students, on the other hand, with strong social skills are at a low risk for serious problems.

Johnson and Johnson (as cited in Baloche, 1998) state that "building shared values is important. It leads to increased interpersonal skills and to successful conflict resolution" (p. 19). This is a lifelong skill that will not only benefit children in their academic years, but will carry over into their adult life.

> When children have difficulties that lead to a need for treatment in psychiatric clinics, mental health centers, and adolescent treatment facilities, and the like, it usually is discovered that they have deficiencies in social decision-making and problem-solving skills. Treatment often consists of providing them with those skills. (Elias & Tobias, 1990, p. 9)

"Our success or failure at instilling in our students those virtues, which are the backbone of good character, will determine their destinies---and that of our nation"

(Ryan & Bohlin, 1999, p. 72). The goal of teachers is to create responsible students who will become responsible adults. Children who have a basic knowledge in social skills and problem solving techniques become adults who have a better chance of having meaningful relationships with others, cooperating with co-workers, and mediating conflicts. Hamburg (1994) states that, "It may well be that understanding of the processes of conflict resolution between groups within a nation will concomitantly enhance our ability to reduce conflict between nations- and vice versa" (p.3). This is a global issue that is unfortunately evident at both sites.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Evidence can be collected to document the existing problem. Teacher surveys, student surveys, and teacher checklists were administered to identify a lack of the following social skills in the targeted classes: listening, time-on-task, encouragement, self control, and problem solving.

Teacher Surveys

Surveys were distributed to classroom teachers during the second week of September. Teachers in special areas such as art, music, and physical education were also asked to complete the survey. This survey is presented in Appendix A. Twenty-four surveys were distributed at site A, and 31 surveys at site B. Seventy-five percent of the surveys were returned at sites A and B. Teachers were asked to complete the survey based on the social skills they had observed this year. For each question they could respond, yes (Y), no (N), or sometimes (S). An additional comment section was provided so that teachers could elaborate on their survey responses.

Table 5 represents the results of the teacher survey. Teachers reported that a majority of students have difficulty with problem solving at both sites. A higher percentage of students at site A have difficulty with actively listening and encouraging others than site B. A significant number of students at site B display a lack of listening and encouraging others as a major problem area. At both sites, teachers indicated a need for improvement in the areas of self control and time on task although the

percentages were significantly lower than the other skills. Results of the survey provide evidence that a significant number of students at both sites exhibit a lack of social skills. Students were surveyed to obtain additional data on their social skills.

Table 5

Results of Teacher Survey

	Site A			Site B		
Item	Y	N	S	Y	N	S
Problem solve	17%	5%	78%	17%	5%	78%
Actively listen	17%	5%	78%	35%	8%	57%
Encourage others	6%	6%	88%	30%	5%	65%
Self control	41%	6%	53%	48%	4%	48%
Refocus to task	39%	0%	61%	48%	4%	48%

Student Surveys

Surveys were given during the second week of September. A copy of the survey is presented in Appendix A. At site A, 25 surveys were administered and collected in the regular education third grade class (site A1) and 42 surveys in the fifth grade physical education class (site A2). At site B, 24 fifth grade students in physical education completed the survey in their homeroom setting. Students were asked to think about their behavior and to decide how often they exhibit that behavior. For each question they could respond, hardly ever (H), sometimes (S), and most of the time (M). Table 6 represents the results of the survey.

Table 6

Results of Student Survey by Sites

	A1			A2			B		
Item	H	S	M	H	S	M	H	S	M
Listening									
1. Without Interrupting	4%	20%	76%	2%	10%	88%	0%	32%	68%
2. To Teachers	0%	40%	60%	0%	12%	88%	4%	14%	82%
3. To Classmates	0%	20%	80%	3%	12%	85%	5%	18%	77%
Time On Task									
1. Group Participation	0%	36%	64%	0%	14%	86%	0%	18%	82%
2. Follow Directions	0%	4%	96%	0%	10%	90%	4%	4%	92%
Encourage Classmates									
1. Verbal Compliments	0%	24%	76%	2%	40%	58%	4%	23%	73%
2. Inspire Strugglers	0%	44%	56%	10%	47%	43%	4%	55%	41%
Self Control									
1. Controls Temper	8%	52%	40%	2%	19%	79%	5%	45%	50%
2. Amicably Disagree	4%	40%	56%	4%	29%	67%	9%	50%	41%
3. Doesn't Distract	0%	28%	72%	0%	10%	90%	0%	5%	95%
Problem Solving									
1. Think Before Reacting	8%	44%	48%	2%	51%	47%	5%	52%	43%
2. Discuss Problem	4%	72%	24%	7%	36%	57%	4%	41%	55%

At site A1 and site B a significant number of students indicated that they struggle with listening skills. A lower percentage of students felt that listening was a problem at site A2. In the classroom setting (A1), a higher percentage of students reported that they had difficulty remaining on task than in the physical education classes at site A2

or site B. Students at all three sites reported that they are less likely to encourage classmates when they have done something well, than when they are struggling. A substantial number of students at sites A1 and B expressed difficulty with self control. A slightly lower percentage was reported at A2. About fifty percent of the students at all three sites experienced difficulty thinking about a solution before reacting to a problem. At site A1 a majority of students believe that they only sometimes talk things over with classmates when a problem arises. A significantly lower percentage of students at site A2 and site B share this concern. In conclusion, a significant number of students at both sites report that they struggle with consistently demonstrating the appropriate use of social skills thereby presenting evidence that students lack social skills. The last method of gathering data involved observing and recording student behavior through a teacher checklist in each targeted classroom.

Teacher Checklist

A teacher observation checklist was created to show evidence of negative social behaviors (See Appendix B). Each time a negative behavior was displayed, a tally mark was recorded by the teacher on a checklist chart. The observations were made daily and continued for a period of two weeks. In the targeted physical education classes, observations were made throughout the 30 minute class period. In the targeted third grade class, observations were made throughout the day.

Table 7 represents the results of the teacher checklist. All the tally marks for each week were totaled for each negative behavior, then that number was divided by the total number of tallies for all negative behaviors at the site for each week. For example, during week one at site B, 32 tally marks for not listening were divided by 58 overall tallies recorded on the chart for all negative behaviors. This means that of the negative behaviors observed, 55% represents the percentage of tallies recorded for not listening.

Table 7

Results of Teacher Checklist by Sites

	Week 1			Week 2		
Negative Behavior	A1	A2	B	A1	A2	B
Not on task	50%	22%	16%	50%	16%	6%
Not listening	29%	42%	55%	27%	40%	80%
Lack of self control	15%	15%	17%	16%	8%	12%
Inability to problem solve	4%	12%	3%	4%	20%	2%
Not encouraging	2%	9%	9%	3%	16%	0%
Number of negative behaviors	157	76	58	153	23	49

At site A1, the students struggled with remaining on task. At sites A2 and B, off task behavior was observed, but not as frequently as in the third grade classroom. A lack of listening skills was displayed at all three sites, with sites A2 and B showing a greater issue with listening. At all sites, a lack of self control was exhibited. Site A2 had a higher frequency of incidents where students were unable to problem solve than at sites A1 and B. Not encouraging others and student put-downs were recorded at a higher occurrence in the targeted physical education classes (site A2 and B) than in the targeted general third grade class. There was a variation in the number of incidence recorded in the physical education classes from week one to week two due to the variation in the competitiveness of the activities. Results of the teacher checklist indicate that a significant number of students struggle with social skills.

The three instruments used for gathering data support the conclusion that there is a lack of social skills among students at all three sites. There are several

probable causes that might contribute to a lack of social skills.

Probable Causes

The researchers have determined that there are many contributing factors to the lack of social skills among elementary children. Probable causes have been found at both targeted sites and are found at the national level as well. Causes relate to the family structure, television, schools, parental pressure and the competitive classroom environment.

Family Structure

One major factor in the lack of social skills is the change in the family structure. Burke states (1992),

> The American family continues to undergo changes. The "typical" family consisting of a married couple with children has declined in number while every kind of "atypical" family has increased. According to Hodgkinson (1991), 4.3 million children are living with a mother who has never married (up 678% since 1970). Today in America, one out of every four babies is born to an unmarried mother (Chapman, 1991). Because of the increase in the number of unmarried women having children and the high divorce rate, fifteen million children are being raised by single mothers who will have about one-third as much to spend on their needs as children being raised by two parents (Hodgkinson, 1991). Eitzen (1992), says that "children from single-parent families are less likely to be high achievers; they are consistently more likely to be late, truant, and subject to disciplinary action; and they are more than twice as likely to drop out of school. (p. xix)

More and more children are coming from divorced or single parent homes. In 1970, 40% of the families were traditional. By 1998, the number of traditional families

plummeted to 25% (Reardon, 1999). At site A, 16% of the targeted students come from divorced or single parent homes, and 18% have been identified from site B. Not only has there been a decline in the traditional family, there has also been a change in the parental role. Many children are faced with family issues that are prevalent in today's society which cause isolation, separation, and a lack of socialization within the family (Johnson & Johnson, 1995b). Brendtro and Long (1995) state that

> more families are disrupted by divorce, abuse, poverty, drugs, and other forces that interfere with normal parenting. Adults whose own lives are chaotic cannot effectively monitor and manage children's activities or affiliations. Nor can they spend time with children, teach conflict resolution skills, or communicate consistent behavioral expectations. (p. 53)

Packard indicates (1983), "a new breed of parent is emerging, much less family-oriented than traditionally" (p. 8). His study found "43% of the parents surveyed to be of this new breed. They put self-fulfillment over worldly success and duty to self over duty to others, including their own children" (Packard, 1983, p. 8).

Another change in the family structure is an increase in the number of dual working parents (Bellanca, 1992). At both sites, an average of 66% of the targeted students have dual working parents. When both parents are employed outside of the home, or there is a single working parent, there is a probability that less time is spent teaching socialization. "The average amount of one-to-one contact time between parent and child is now approximately fifteen minutes per day" (McCabe & Rhoades, 1992, p. 210). As a result, family dining is becoming a fading custom in America (Packard, 1983). Meal times were a vehicle for family members to interact, share the day's activities and develop relationships. Today, families "don't have the luxury of

spending as much time together as our own parents spent with us, teaching us the lessons of the heart. Our communities are no longer functional villages, responsive to children's needs. Kids are growing up further and further away from a deep sense of community" (Lantieri & Patti, 1996, p. 5-6). The breakdown in the traditional family routines has negatively affected our schools. The result is "more students arriving at the schoolhouse door without the basic social skills in place" (Bellanca, 1992, p. 202). The current structure of many families today is leading to a lack of social skills in children. Television is also contributing to this problem.

Television

Another probable cause for deficient social skills is the amount of time children spend watching television. "In the average U.S. household the TV set is on about six or seven hours a day" (Packard, 1983, p. 93). The targeted third grade students watch an average of 1 hour and 30 minutes of television on a school day. Students at site A2 watch 2 hours and 45 minutes of TV from the targeted fifth grade physical education class, while the targeted fifth grade physical education students at site B watch an average of 5 hours per school day. Both sites indicate a range of 0-20 hours of viewing per week. In many cases, watching television has taken the place of meaningful time spent with peers, parents, and other significant adults. According to statistics compiled by TV Free America in 1999, "every week, the average kid between two and 11 watches 1,197 minutes of TV and spends 39 minutes talking with his or her parents" (p. 1).

Programs on television often model antisocial behavior. The top television programs viewed by the targeted students at both sites included: Celebrity Death Match, Beavis and Butthead, Simpsons, Poke'mon, and ER. These programs emphasize violence, disrespect, and inappropriate language and behavior. Violent

programs can be seen at all hours of the day and are increased with the easy access of cable networks. "A three year study by the U.S. Surgeon General's office concluded: the more violence a child sees on TV the more aggressive he is likely to be in his own attitudes and behavior" (Packard, 1983, p. 99). Violence and deviant behaviors are not only evident in movies, but in news broadcasts, sports, cartoons, talk shows and video games. There is no avoiding violent themes in today's daily programming. "It has been shown that children who watch them consistently are more aggressive than their peers" (Brendtro & Long, 1995, p. 54).

> Children model what they see in real life as well as on television. Television, with its aptitude for modeling anti-social, anti-caring behaviors, has filled a void in the character formation of today's youth. If a child wants to learn how adults solve problems, he or she needs only to watch the horror movies and the detective shows to master the arts of "shoot-em-down" or "beat-em-up." (Bellanca, 1992, p. 202)

A great number of television programs today lack positive role models for children.

> Many of their role models on television and in real life are people who get attention at the expense of somebody else's humiliation. Many students live in a family where "cutting down" their brothers and sisters and parents is commonplace. The fastest and wittiest person always seems to have the last laugh and ends up the "winner." (Burke, 1992, p. 40)

Because of the influx of violence and other negative behaviors, it is not surprising that children imitate aggressive and undesirable acts in the halls, playgrounds, and classrooms of our schools. Television programs often model poor social skills which has a negative effect on the socialization of children. Schools can also contribute to the problem by not teaching social skills.

Social Skills

Schools today are under pressure to cover an ever expanding curriculum. In addition, state mandates and district objectives also limit the instructional time in the classroom for social skills. "What we seem to have forgotten in all our concern with individual development is that schools are social institutions. Their first function is to socialize. Quite frankly, many of them have forgotten how to do that" (Kilpatrick, 1992, p. 226).

Some probable causes exist within the school walls. First, there is a lack of social skill training among students by educators.

> Few schools have made a commitment to teaching their students the procedures necessary to manage conflicts constructively. Without direct training, many students may never learn. Classrooms need to become places where destructive conflicts are prevented and where constructive conflicts are utilized to improve the quality of classroom life and instruction. (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Ward, & Magnuson, 1995, p. 842)

Burke (1992) also echoes this premise that social skills must be taught. "If teachers don't take the short time to re-educate students with positive social skills, they will spend a great deal of time "correcting" and "disciplining" disruptive students throughout the year" (p. 41). Second, because children are very impressionable, teachers' attitudes and behaviors can greatly affect the social development of their students.

> As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or honor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated

and a child humanized or de-humanized. (Ginott as cited by Lantieri & Patti, 1996, p. 117)

Many schools do not take responsibility for the socialization of children. At site A, 56% of the teachers polled indicated that they did not teach social skills, and 11% indicated that they only teach social skills sometimes. At site B, 4% of the teachers do not formally teach social skills and 39% teach it sometimes. In addition to the schools, parental expectations often impedes the development of prosocial behaviors.

Parental Pressure

Another contributing factor for poor social skills among children is stress caused by parental pressure to excel academically in school. "From the standpoint of educating well-socialized persons, pressure for academic achievement should never predominate the total welfare of a child, since such pressure may prove to be self-defeating for academic achievement and often inhibits emotional growth" (Bonney, Grosz, & Roark, 1986, p. 142-143). Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (1986) adds , "... children from achievement-oriented homes excel in planfulness and performances, but they are also more aggressive, tense, domineering, and cruel...It would appear that education for excellence if pursued single-mindedly may entail some sobering social costs" (as cited by Bonney, Grosz, & Roark, p.139-140). When a child's focus is on academic achievement, the development of friendships and the ability to relate to others is often arrested. As a result, children become isolated from their classmates and may act out or withdraw. Parental pressure is not the only stressor contributing to a lack of social skills. Schools that promote competition also inadvertently block the socialization process.

Competitive Classroom

Stress is also caused by the competitive classroom environment. Children are

competing for attention, grades, awards, and rewards. Instead of fostering a caring and cooperative classroom, the classroom structure forces children to work against rather than with one another. "They either work hard in school to do better than the other students, or they take it easy because they do not believe they have a chance to win" (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1991, p. 14). The effects of competition varies from child to child. For some, competition is a motivator, while for others, "Competition has the potential to undermine motivation for learning---especially intrinsic motivation" (Kohn as cited by Baloche, 1998, p. 5-6). Often in the classroom, students compare their homework, projects, and test scores to those of their classmates. Competition tends to create more interest in how one's performance compares to others' than interest in the task itself. In competitive situations, the children focus more on themselves, which promotes an attitude of "It's all about me." This does not foster a caring atmosphere in the classroom towards others. Competitive classrooms do not reinforce the development of social skills such as encouragement and problem solving. Children focus on reaching the top, even if it is at the expense of other classmates.

In summary, it is apparent that there are many factors contributing to a lack of social skills in elementary children. Research reveals that problems with the family structure, the influence of television, a lack of social skill instruction in the schools, parental pressure, and emphasis on competition in the classroom all negatively influence the development of social skills. The schools have little or no control of factors such as the decay of family structure, the effects of television, and parental pressure. However, some causes can be addressed such as the lack of social skill instruction and competition within the classrooms. In order to improve social skills among students, there are several strategies that can be implemented in the schools.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

A review of the literature reveals several options for improving student social skills. Solutions found for students who lack social skills include: formal social skill instruction, teaching positive social skills through cooperative learning, direct teaching of conflict resolution strategies, holding open classroom meetings for problem solving and decision making, teaching for understanding by using relevant curriculum, and strengthening family/school connections.

Social Skill Instruction

Direct social skill instruction is essential if social skills are to be developed in children. Elias and Tobias (1990) cite that "social decision making skills can---and, we feel must---be built as part of the education of students in schools" (p. 26). They further add, that schools should be the "primary common, public socializer of children" (Elias & Tobias, 1990, p. 26).

> If we want our children to possess the traits of character that we most admire, we need to teach them what those traits are. They must learn to identify the forms and contents of those traits. They must achieve at least a minimal level of moral literacy that will enable them to make sense of what they see in life and, we may hope, will help them live it well. (Bennett, 1999, p. 1)

A drawback to teaching social skills is the lack of time in an ever expanding curriculum. State testing as well as district policies put additional strain on

instructional time. This is especially true for teachers who have limited access to students such as physical education, art, and music teachers. However, educators have a responsibility to teach social skills to children at every level. Bellanca states that a well conceived early childhood program ought to be saturated with social skill instruction and opportunity for the young students to practice as they play together" (as cited by Burke, 1992, p. 41). Burke (1992) further states, "that the primary grades provides the best opportunity for students to develop the foundation of social skills, but the emphasis on skills must be continued in the middle grades and high school because that is where the peer pressure is strongest" (p. 41). Research has proven that early childhood education can prevent or reduce anti-social behaviors that increase the likelihood of trouble with the law later in life (Parsons, 1999, p. 2-7).

Social skills are necessary for fostering and maintaining relationships. The foundation of relationships depends on social skills such as listening, cooperation, caring, problem solving, encouragement, and respect. Children with well developed social skills feel better about themselves, are more sensitive to the needs of others, and are more effective problem solvers.

> Teaching cooperative social skills to students will help them develop interpersonal skills, self-esteem, and an internal locus of control. Responsible and caring students are more cooperative than irresponsible, non-caring students. A teacher's goal should be to provide the framework of a caring, cooperative classroom so that students begin to handle their own individual discipline problems, problems within their groups, and class-wide problems. (Burke, 1992, p. 41)

Social skills must be developed if children are to foster friendships. Some children acquire these skills with ease, and others need continued practice. Get to know-you-activites that include allowing time for children to share their favorite

hobbies and sports is one method of building community within a classroom.

> To develop friendships children must accomplish two related tasks. First, they must relate in a way that is acceptable to peers in social situations. Thus, they must have an awareness of the social context of relationships and interactions, the impact of their behaviors on others, and the ability to take another person's perspective. Second, they must learn the skills of friendship that will be necessary for relationships later in life. (Goldstein, 1995, p. 375)

The role of the teacher is essential in the socialization process. If children are to be successful, they must be taught strategies for implementation of social skills such as listening, encouraging, problem solving, self control, and time on task. According to Kohn (1998), when teaching social skills teachers should, "engage students in deep, critical reflection about certain ways of being" (p. 17). He warns against meaningless drilling of students in specific behaviors. Drilling of sport skills without applying it to a game situation makes it difficult for students to make connections between practice and game play. In the classroom, rote memorization of facts such as lengthy computation drills, historical dates, or the periodic table without application to real life situations leaves the children learning without purpose.

Bellanca (1992) recommends using direct instruction in a step-by-step fashion. First, the teacher introduces the social skill using an activity to hook the students. Next, a lesson follows where students use a reflective process to discover what they did and said during the activity. The third step is for students to have repeated opportunities to practice the targeted behavior for at least a week. The fourth step allows for weekly class reflections on their progress. Step five involves feedback on progress, recognition, and celebration of success. Last, the students are ready to transfer their newly honed skills into the content areas. Based on the researchers' experiences, if a

teacher were teaching self control, the class could read together, Don't Rant and Rave on Wednesday by A. Moser. After reflecting on the story, students could create a web or T-chart to illustrate the behaviors emphasized during the hook activity (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991). Next, students could practice self control through cooperative group work and/or by role playing. Through journaling and class discussions students would monitor their growth. In addition, positive feedback and recognition can be acknowledged by the teacher and peers. To maintain the skill, teachers need to review newly learned social skills before lessons involving cooperative learning. Finally, students are ready to transfer their skills with self control to real life situations. By providing modeling, guided practice, and constructive feedback, children become actively engaged in their socialization process. A proven strategy for promoting the development of social skills is through cooperative learning activities.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a method that can be implemented for reinforcing social skills. Through the very nature of well structured cooperative groups, children can learn to work with one another, become encouragers, and have an opportunity to practice other social skills necessary in today's world.

> Studies focused on cooperative learning groups have shown that these kinds of learning experiences make significant contributions to the socialization of students, particularly by increasing affiliating bonds and mutual respect between diverse categories of students who work together toward achieving a learning goal important to all participants. (Bonney, Grosz, Roark, 1986, p. 177)

Formation of cooperative groups can be created by student interest, teacher placement, or at random. Once groups are formed, each group member is given a task card that describes their assigned job for that particular activity. For example,

roles may include the recorder, equipment manager, time keeper, encourager and/or reporter. "Cooperative learning as an instructional process inherently helps students develop responsibility because each student is not only accountable for her or his own performance, she or he is responsible for helping fellow group members know and understand the assignment" (McCabe & Rhoades, 1992, p. 212). When students work together toward a common goal, they gain a sense of community.

> Our classrooms need to be safe environments where our students can take risks to reach and exceed their perceived ability levels and where each and every student feels important and valued. In other words, our classrooms should strive to become micro-communities. A community is established with students caring, helping, and respecting each other. These students not only learn about responsibility, they gain social skills, enhance self-esteem, and increase their academic performance. (McCabe & Rhoades, 1992, p. 212)

A sense of community helps to ensure that everyone comprehends the concepts to be mastered. Emphasis shifts from focusing on individual learning to providing support and understanding for all group members. "Cooperative learning is used to increase student achievement, create more positive relationships among students, and generally improve students' psychological well-being" (Johnson & Johnson, 1992, p.185). Consequently, students are getting along with each other, there are fewer disruptions, and there is more time for learning. Cooperative groups can provide an environment where students care for one another, share, and demonstrate a willingness to help peers.

Many teachers may be unfamiliar with cooperative learning and hesitant to implement new teaching strategies. To adequately teach social skills in a cooperative setting, funding may be necessary for staff development. This type of funding is not

always available in school districts. Once trained, cooperative learning also requires more planning and time on the part of educators.

The success of cooperative learning also depends upon the strength of interpersonal skills. "Students must (1) get to know and trust each other, (2) communicate accurately and unambiguously, (3) accept and support each other, and (4) resolve conflicts constructively" (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1991, p. 113). By providing activities that promote community and problem solving throughout the year, students improve and build upon their interpersonal skills. Researchers have had success with activities such as partner interviews, creating class graphs that show information about individuals' hobbies/interests, and people searches whereby students seek out class members with similar interests give students the opportunity to get to know and interact with one another.

The research indicates that moving from a traditional style of teaching where students work independently or against one another competitively, to a cooperative classroom, increases the likelihood of building a caring community of learners. Johnson and Johnson (1995a) point out that "In a competitive context, individuals strive to win while ensuring their opponents lose" (p. 65). They further state that students involved in cooperative learning have "higher achievement and increased use of higher-level reasoning strategies, more caring and supportive relationships, and greater psychological health" (Johnson & Johnson, 1996, p.14-15). One way to move to a cooperative atmosphere involves eliminating extrinsic rewards such as awards, stickers, candy, and prizes that foster competition between students.

Schools that teach cooperative learning and focus on intrinsic rewards are more likely to have fewer conflicts. Since it is impossible to eliminate all conflicts,

students must be taught how to resolve problems as they arise.

Conflict Resolution

Based on the researchers' experiences and observations, it is apparent that conflict resolution should be formally taught. Discipline problems are prevalent in the classroom. Children tease, criticize, fight, argue, and humiliate one another. They need to develop the skills necessary to manage and solve problems independently and peacefully.

> Classrooms need to become places where destructive conflicts are prevented and where constructive conflicts are utilized to improve the quality of classroom life and instruction. Based on the results of this study, schools can develop training programs that will provide students the conflict procedures and skills they need to develop socially, cognitively, and morally. (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Ward, & Magnuson, 1995, p. 842)

In order for a school to successfully instruct students in conflict resolution, there are several factors that should be present. Having the support of the school social worker, psychologist, and other staff members creates a network that is invaluable to the classroom teacher. Unfortunately, these services are not available in all school districts. Without the allocation of time, training, and funding for teachers, conflict resolution instruction can be more difficult to implement. With the necessary resources in place, children can be taught with greater ease to manage conflicts.

Knowing the steps to negotiating conflicts allows students to resolve problems on their own. Familiarity with the process provides children with a tool to use when their emotions run high. Johnson, Johnson, Dudley and Burnett (1992) in their Peacemaker Program advise teaching all students how to negotiate constructively.

1. State what you want.
2. State how you feel.
3. State the reasons for your wants and feelings.
4. Summarize your understanding of what the other person wants, how the other person feels, and the reasons underlying both.
5. Invent three optional plans to resolve the conflict.
6. Choose one plan and shake hands.

By using negotiation steps, students will learn ways of defusing conflicts before they escalate. Also, they will learn to stop and think before they react to a conflict situation (Meek, 1992). It is important that children learn how to express their feelings as well as to understand another person's point of view. One way to teach children how to express themselves is through role playing. Scenarios written on activity cards that involve targeted emotions such as anger or disappointment can be discussed and acted out in small groups or by the class as a whole. Brainstorming ways to handle feelings such as talking, listening to music, and exercising provides children with a healthy outlet (Thompson & Strange, 1988). Another technique is to teach children different points of view through literature. The use of literature allows children the opportunity to take on the role of a character and experience conflict and emotions from a different perspective. In so doing, there is a greater chance of reaching a resolution (Kohn, 1998).

In teaching the negotiation steps, it is essential that the teacher be a strong role model. The teacher can demonstrate and model the steps to negotiation. Next, opportunities can be provided for cooperative groups to role play different types of conflicts and practice the negotiation steps in progression. For example, playing fair is often a problem with children whether in the classroom or gymnasium. In teaching

conflict resolution, the teacher can present the problem and model the appropriate behavior step by step. The class can brainstorm together situations where fair play is an issue. After that, student volunteers can role play some of the situations that the children deem unfair and model the use of the steps. Finally, the class can practice the negotiation steps in pairs. Lantieri and Patti (1996) state, "In schools where conflicts are resolved peaceably by adults and student mediators, young people grow up seeing this way as the norm. The culture of the school reflects this active process; fights diminish, arguments become discussions, and kids feel emotionally and physically safe" (p. 53).

Children need to be able to monitor and modify their own behavior. Johnson and Johnson in 1996, indicated that self regulation is important for cognitive and social development. The teacher can introduce the idea of self control through T-charts where the children describe how it looks, sounds and feels to be in control of themselves (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991). Removing oneself from an activity or journal writing are alternatives that children can use to help them handle their emotions. Another alternative is to create a station in the classroom (Negotiation Station) where students can independently resolve conflicts by following the posted steps to conflict resolution as previously stated. Conflicts can be growth enhancing. "Conflicts can enrich relationships, clarify personal identity, increase ego strength, promote resilience in the face of adversity, and clarify how one needs to change. It is not the presence of conflict that is to be feared but, rather, its destructive management" (Johnson & Johnson, 1995b, p. 64). Children benefit from stepping back and analyzing the conflict situation before things get out of hand. Conflict resolution usually involves a small number of students, whereas, open meetings provide a forum for class problem solving.

Open Meetings

Open meetings are scheduled times when all members of the class and the teacher sit together to discuss important topics. This is a forum whereby class rules can be established, classroom procedures can be agreed upon, and class problems can be worked through.

> The purpose (of open meetings) is to encourage the students to seek solutions to problems, never to find fault or assign blame. Children learn the skills to express their own thoughts and feelings, to listen to others, and to think about their behavior. Thinking critically about their own past actions, as well as the actions of their peers, seems to enable children to construct positive scenarios for solving problems. Open meetings increase children's understanding of and empathy for one another. This leads to increased respect and appreciation for the differences and contributions of all class members. (Lundeberg, Emmett, Osland & Lindquist, 1997, p. 36-37)

The focus of an open meeting is problem solving. Faber and Mazlish (1996) suggest a step-by-step process to use in class meetings:

1. Students express their feelings and needs.
2. Teacher summarizes their point of view.
3. The teacher expresses his or her feelings and needs.
4. Students brainstorm possible solutions.
5. All ideas are recorded.
6. Together, the class comes to consensus.

Everyone gains in an arena where problems are discussed and solved together in a non-threatening manner. Karmos and Karmos (1987) express that the benefits of problem solving are that "They (the students) create mental pictures, relate problems

to familiar or concrete experiences, ask themselves questions, think aloud, brainstorm, make diagrams or flowcharts, and use physical aids to thinking" (p. 99).

Open meetings, however, take a great deal of time. In physical education, art, and music classes time is already limited. A 30 minute open meeting time may consume an entire class period. Sometimes, teachers may find themselves caught in a dilemma where they have to choose between covering curriculum and addressing the social needs of the children through an open meeting environment.

When given the chance to participate in open meetings, students have a sense of ownership in decisions that affect them. "Allowing students to be joint architects in matters affecting them promotes feelings of control and autonomy" (Johnson et al, 1992). Through open meetings, children can be given opportunities to make choices in their learning that seem relevant to their lives. Making sure that the curriculum is relevant is another key element necessary for fostering strong social skills.

Relevant Curriculum

In addition to creating a caring community of learners, the schools must provide a curriculum that is stimulating and applicable to the child's world. In school districts where teachers must solely adhere to the adopted curriculum, it may be impossible to branch out and teach lessons that are stimulating and of interest to the children. When teachers are given the opportunity to teach for understanding, students are more engaged learners. "Students need to feel that what they are studying is relevant, that they themselves are important, and that they can succeed. Glasser's assertation is that "school must be meaningful and satisfying to the student" (as cited by Burke, 1992, p. 56). When connections are made to prior learning, teachers are teaching for understanding and "...learning is an active process for building increasingly elaborate mental pictures of representations of what we "know," and connecting them with each other in increasingly complex ways" (Dalton & Watson, 1997, p. 82).

Two necessary conditions must be present for curriculum relevancy. The first condition is for teachers to provide support for the children. "A supportive learning environment is one that supports children in building their own understandings or mental representations---in thinking for themselves and recognizing that their ideas and solutions may differ from those of others" (Dalton & Watson, 1997, p. 85). All ideas and efforts are never minimized, but are taken seriously by everyone. This process can be supported through the constructivist theory of learning where "...knowledge is constructed and continuously reconstructed by individuals and groups...we must operate on experience to produce knowledge. As a result, knowledge has a personal quality and is unique for each individual" (Joyce & Weil, 1996, p. 76). Here, children are allowed to explore and construct their own meaning. For example, in a third grade math classroom, children discover the formula for Pi instead being directly taught the formula. They measure the circumferences and diameters of several cylindrical objects varying in size. The data is recorded on individual charts which are later transferred to a class chart. The children study the results to determine a relationship. The circumference is about three times the diameter. As the relationship is discovered, each child explains the strategy that was used. Some children use addition to find the relationship, others may use multiplication or division. Providing time for children to think for themselves and explore their ideas in an atmosphere that is conducive to risk taking supports children's learning.

The second condition is for teachers to challenge children's learning. "We challenge children's learning by helping them ask questions and recognize discrepancies in their mental representations and theories" (Dalton & Watson, 1997, p. 86). This can be accomplished through Socratic dialogue.

Socratic dialogue is based on the belief that it is not enough to encourage students to ask questions. Instead, teachers must develop a

> classroom culture in which the experience of asking questions is consistently rewarded by teacher and peers alike to develop a culture in which the goal is to learn, not just to know. (Fogarty, 1997, p. 87)

This is a questioning technique whereby children must clarify their ideas by responding to questions such as: What is your reasoning for that? Why do you believe that? How do you know that? "These questions tend to make student views more explicit, to help them interpret meaning, to become consistent and logical, and to help them see assumptions, fallacies, and faulty reasoning in their thinking" (Fogarty, 1997, p. 88). These valuable learning experiences help children create their own view of the world.

According to Dalton and Watson (1997) there are six significant principles which are central to helping children learn for understanding. First, the content (curriculum) must be focused on important questions that children want to know. One way to draw questions from children is to complete a KWL chart (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991). There are three columns on the chart. The first (K) is entitled, "What do you know?" The children list everything they know about the particular subject. The next column is entitled (W), "What do you want to find out?" Here, children list questions they have. The last column is entitled (L) "What did you learn?" The questions raised by the children guide the learning and discovering process. The children are now invested learners focused on important questions relevant to them. The second principle central to children's learning is that there must be context. Children should be "using important processes and learning skills instead of just practicing them for their own sake" (Dalton & Watson, 1997, p. 86). For example, once children have learned how to compute, they can use or apply this skill for problem solving. Third, children should be making connections to prior learning. For example, elementary students learn the importance of stepping out with the opposite foot when throwing a

ball. Later, when learning sports that involve this skill, such as: baseball, bowling, or football, students make a connection with prior learning that improves their ability and chances for success. Fourth, the processes should promote understanding. Children should "have lots of opportunities to engage in active processes such as discovery, observation and description, collaborative dialogue, prediction, and formulation of and inquiry about their own questions" (Dalton & Watson, 1997, p. 87). Fifth, children should have multiple ways to represent their thinking such as through writing, art, graphs, diagrams, music, and drama. Sixth, there should be a climate of community that supports and challenges understanding. Children need to "feel encouraged to figure out and safe enough to make mistakes" (Dalton & Watson, 1997, p. 87).

A science unit on Simple Machines can be used to demonstrate these principles. The teacher can start the unit with a KWL. As each of the six simple machines are presented, the children discover through experimentation how the machines make work easier. As they work their way through the unit, they are comparing and contrasting the machines. This allows them to make connections. They can apply what they have learned to create a complex machine which uses several simple machines. Through this project there are opportunities for children to collaborate, discuss, predict, explore and make discoveries through trial and error. Their learning can be represented as a model or as a drawing with movable parts. The children can present their projects in written form, or give oral reports. It is possible to even create a human machine through creative dramatics. The teacher serves as a guide, leading children through questions such as "What if..?" or "How did you discover that?" Children are learning that the trial and error process is challenging and fun. By thinking through these six principles when planning a unit, a teacher can be assured of a relevant curriculum that will stimulate the students. Providing a relevant curriculum is only part of the solution. Parents, too, must be

involved in their child's school life and in the development of prosocial behaviors and attitudes.

Family/School Connection

A lack of social skills is a problem that faces the schools and the family. It is vital to have education and open communication between the two institutions. It has been the experience of the researchers that schools can educate and communicate through parent newsletters, open forums for parent/teacher organizations, and parent-training workshops. This allows schools and parents to be proactive rather than reactive.

Families can play an active role in the socialization of their children. McEwan (1992) offers some suggestions for the family to socialize together. Three key ideas for parents to incorporate are a one-on-one time with each child, time for discussion about the school day, and cooperative family activities. Some activities include: parent/child gym nights, family bingo nights, and family reading nights. Parents who spend quality time with their children have a "perfect opportunity for modeling the very social skills you so desperately want your child to develop" (McEwan, 1992, p. 169).

However, due to the change in family structure and dual working parents, families today have a limited amount of time to spend together, let alone at P.T.O. meetings or parent training workshops. This places an added challenge on the schools to promote and maintain parent involvement.

The researchers plan on using many forms of the strategies presented above. The main emphasis will be formal social skill instruction, the implementation of cooperative learning, direct teaching of conflict resolution strategies, holding open classroom meetings for problem solving and decision making, and strengthening family/school connections. In so doing, a more caring climate will be created through cooperative learning, positive relationships among students will increase, and

students will develop the ability to solve conflicts independently.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of increased instructional time devoted to teaching social skills during the period of September, 1999, through December, 1999, the targeted third grade classroom and the fifth grade physical education classes will increase their positive social skills. This will be measured by teacher and student surveys, behavior checklists and anecdotal records.

In order to accomplish the objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Teaching of these social skills: Listening, encouragement, time on task, self control and problem solving.
2. Creating a cooperative classroom through the use of cooperative learning activities.
3. Teaching of conflict resolution (negotiation) techniques.
4. Instituting open meetings to problem solve and deal with feelings.
5. Implementing classroom expectations and procedures that foster a caring classroom community.

Action Plan

I. Week 1 & 2

A. Formally teach encouragement, listening skills, & time-on-task

Time: 3 times per week - 30 minutes a week

1. Create T-Charts - make a copy to send home in parent letter.
2. Role play situations using encouragement, listening skills & time-on-task.
3. Target using encouragement, listening skills & time-on-task in cooperative learning groups.
4. Review skills before any group activities.

B. Involve students in community building activities

Time: 3 times per week - 45 minutes a week

1. Implement get-to-know-you activities in small groups.
2. Implement get-to-know-you activities in whole group.

C. Introduce open meetings (Students formulate class rules and expectations)

Time: 1 time only - 30 minutes

D. Assessment

1. Teachers complete behavior checklist.
2. Teachers keep anecdotal notes.
3. Student reflections will focus on current social skills.
4. Give staff survey.

II. Week 3 & 4

A. Formally teach problem solving and self control

Time: 3 times per week - 30 minutes a week

1. Create T-Charts - make a copy to send home in parent letter.
2. Teach and display the steps for problem solving during open meetings.
3. Practice problem solving steps through activity cards.
4. Role play situations using problem solving skills & self control.
5. Target using problem solving skills & self control in cooperative learning groups.
6. Review social skills before any group activities.

B. Continue open meetings

Time: 15-30 minutes a week or as needed

C. Assessment

1. Students complete TV time log and record favorite programs.

Time: 15 minutes in week 3 only

2. Teachers complete behavior checklist.
3. Teachers keep anecdotal records.

III. Week 5 & 6

A. Introduce and formally teach conflict resolution (negotiation) steps to class.

Include steps in parent letter

Time: 3 times per week - 45 minutes a week

1. Display negotiation steps.
2. Practice negotiation steps through negotiation activity cards.
3. Role playing exercises.

B. Continue open meetings

Time: 15-30 minutes per week or as needed

C. Reinforce social skills through cooperative learning groups

Time: 3-5 days per week- 1-2 hours per week

D. Assessment

1. Teachers complete behavior checklist.
2. Teachers keep anecdotal records.
3. Student reflect on negotiation steps.

IV. Week 7-11

A. Reinforce social skills

Time: 3-5 days per week - 1-2 hours per week

1. Implement cooperative learning groups.
2. Institute class meetings.
3. Create T-Charts and webs for review & reflection.
4. Use literature for discussions related to social skills.

B. Review and practice negotiation techniques

Time: Once a week - 15-20 minutes per week

1. Create a "Negotiation Station" for students to independently solve conflicts.
2. Model use of "Negotiation Station" to students.

C. Assessment

1. Teachers complete behavior checklist.
2. Teachers keep anecdotal records.
3. Students reflect on negotiation steps.
4. Students reflect on social skills as needed.

V. Week 12

A. Continue action plan

B. Post assessment and data collection

1. Students complete survey.
2. Give staff survey.
3. Teachers keep anecdotal records.
4. Teachers complete behavior checklist.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of these interventions, students as a class will discuss the impact social skill instruction, cooperative learning, conflict resolution, and open meetings have had on the improvement of their social skills. The students will repeat the social skills survey. The fifth grade homeroom teachers and the third and fifth grade specials teachers will repeat the teacher survey as well. The researchers will assess social skills through behavior checklists and teacher anecdotal records.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to increase positive social skills. The implementation of direct social skill instruction, cooperative learning activities, conflict resolution techniques, open meetings, and establishing classroom expectations for a caring classroom, were selected to effect the desired changes.

The evidence for the lack of social skills was collected through teacher surveys, behavior checklists, and anecdotal records. The social skills that were targeted for direct instruction included encouragement, listening, time on task, problem solving, and self-control. The skills were introduced and taught over a 12 week period. At site A2, the skills were taught during gym time. At site B, the skills were taught in the homeroom setting, rather than during the physical education class. The intervention began in mid-September and lasted until mid-December.

In the first two weeks, classroom expectations, procedures, and rules were established during open meetings. In order to create a cooperative and caring classroom, team and community building activities were implemented. Techniques used to foster a cooperative and caring classroom included: Venn diagrams that allowed partners to compare and contrast favorite interests, people searches, and getting-to-know-you activities. Encouragement, listening, and time on task were introduced and taught through the use of T-Charts. Students reflected orally on their application of these social skills in cooperative groups. At site A1, a summary of the first three social skills were discussed in a parent letter.

During weeks three and four, open meetings were continued and previously taught social skills were revisited with the aid of T-Charts. The original plan called for teaching, modeling, and applying the problem solving steps to conflicts that arose during the school day through the use of T-Charts and role playing activities. At site A1, however, there was a deviation from the action plan. Students presented the teacher with recess problems during an open meeting. This necessitated the teaching of the steps at that time in order to bring about a resolution through consensus. Consequently, T-Charts and role playing were not used as an instructional tool at this time.

During weeks five and six, previous social skills were revisited and open meetings were held as needed. The action plan called for the introduction and instruction of conflict resolution steps along with a parent letter. However, all three sites deviated from this plan due to time restrictions and student readiness. The researchers believed that students needed more time to gain competency with the previously taught social skills. In the physical education classes at sites A2 and B, self-control was taught through the use of T-Charts. The T-Chart responses were related and applied to the sport activity the students were engaged in during class. In small groups, students discussed methods of practicing self-control during game play. At this time, site A1 reinforced the use of self-control through literature. Students were asked to describe how the main character in The Chalk Box Kid by Clyde Bulla applied self-control, or what would have happened if the character had maintained self-control. Furthermore, students were introduced to goal setting to assist them in taking charge of their own behavior changes related to self-control (See Appendix C). Also, partners experiencing difficulty with self-control and time on task created T-Charts for what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like to work well with a partner. Name calling was a problem that was arising in the A1 classroom setting. To help the

children overcome this problem, the school social worker facilitated discussions on teasing and presented a series of three lessons on how to cope with teasing.

For the next five weeks social skills were reinforced, open meetings were instituted, cooperative groups were implemented and at site A1, literature was used for discussions related to social skills. The students discussed how Laura in School Days by Laura Ingles Wilder controlled her behavior and how that affected her relationship with the other children. They also discussed how Nellie's temper tantrums affected the feelings and actions of the other children. At all sites, the negotiation steps were taught and practiced through role playing instead of during weeks five and six. A negotiation station was created as a visual aid to help students independently solve conflicts (See Appendix D). At site A1, the Discover text, a drug and health education program, was used to reinforce problem solving and conflict resolution. The students role played various scenarios in order to become more familiar and proficient with the steps. The researcher observed that students were frequently unable to independently problem solve at recess; therefore, this additional instruction and practice was given to help students gain better control of their ability to handle conflicts in real life situations.

During week 12 of the intervention all three sites continued to reinforce social skills through T-Charts, open meetings, and cooperative group activities. Post assessment and data collection took place through the use of student surveys, anecdotal records, and behavior checklists. Students completed a social skills reflection (See Appendix E). Staff surveys were not distributed at the end of the intervention. Researchers believed this survey was most beneficial in documenting evidence that the problem exists. In addition, the majority of the staff did not see the targeted students in an instructional setting.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Student surveys, behavior checklists, anecdotal records, student reflections, and student goal setting were used to document the improvement of social skills exhibited by the students.

Student Surveys

Surveys were given during the final week of intervention in December. At site A, 25 surveys were administered and collected in the regular education third grade class (site A1) and 42 surveys in the fifth grade physical education class (site A2). At site B, 24 fifth grade students in physical education completed the survey in their homeroom setting. Students were once again asked to think about their behavior and respond accordingly. For each question they could respond, hardly ever (H), sometimes (S), and most of the time (M). There were two questions that addressed problem solving, three questions on active listening, two questions on encouraging others, three questions on self control and two questions on refocusing to task. Table 8 represents the results of the survey.

At site A1 students indicated there was an improvement in their listening skills. A large percentage of students at sites A2 and B reported they listened some of the time. This percentage is higher than in the September survey. In September, 9% of the students at site B indicated that they hardly ever listened to teachers and classmates. In the December survey, however, none of the students considered this to be a problem area. Students at all three sites felt they had improved in their ability to remain on task.

In the December survey, it was evident that a greater number of the targeted students believed that they encouraged classmates at least some of the time than in the Fall. This means there was a decline in the percentage of students who responded most of the time in the survey and an increase in the students that

responded some of the time. At site A2, 10% of the students still struggle with encouraging classmates.

Table 8

Results of Student Survey by Sites

	A1			A2			B		
Item	H	S	M	H	S	M	H	S	M
Listening									
1. Without Interrupting	0%	28%	88%	2%	34%	64%	0%	50%	50%
2. To Teachers	0%	4%	96%	0%	14%	86%	0%	23%	77%
3. To Classmates	0%	20%	80%	2%	22%	76%	0%	36%	64%
Time On Task									
1. Group Participation	0%	12%	88%	0%	15%	85%	0%	18%	82%
2. Follow Directions	0%	4%	96%	0%	2%	98%	0%	9%	91%
Encourage Classmates									
1. Verbal Compliments	0%	36%	64%	0%	45%	55%	0%	27%	73%
2. Inspire Strugglers	0%	52%	48%	10%	52%	38%	0%	68%	32%
Self Control									
1. Controls Temper	0%	36%	64%	0%	33%	67%	0%	73%	27%
2. Amicably Disagree	0%	24%	76%	0%	31%	69%	4%	41%	55%
3. Doesn't Distract	0%	32%	68%	0%	19%	81%	4%	41%	55%
Problem Solving									
1. Think Before Reacting	4%	32%	64%	10%	54%	36%	4%	50%	46%
2. Discuss Problem	8%	48%	44%	7%	55%	38%	0%	64%	36%

In the post intervention survey, only 8% of the targeted students believed that they consistently struggle with self control. Before the intervention, 32% of the

students at all sites indicated that they hardly ever controlled their behavior. A majority of students at site A1 felt that they controlled their behavior most of the time. At site B, a significant percentage of students answered in the Fall survey that they demonstrated self control most of the time. After the intervention, however, the students changed their opinion of their ability to control themselves to only some of the time. This change also occurred at site A2, but it was not as pronounced.

From the view point of the students at all three sites, problem solving appears to be the social skill that they struggle with the most. In the initial survey, 30% of the targeted students reported that they hardly ever thought about a solution before reacting to a problem and hardly ever discussed the problem amicably with classmates. This figure rose to 33% in the post intervention survey. As with self control, there was again a downward shift from most of the time responses to some of the time responses at sites A2 and B. Although students at site A1 felt that they struggle with problem solving, they indicated some improvement in this area. The results of the student survey indicated that a number of students perceived themselves as having shown improvement in the targeted social skills. Another form of documentation involved maintaining a teacher checklist.

Teacher Checklist

A teacher observation checklist was implemented to show evidence of negative social behaviors. Each time a negative behavior was displayed, a tally mark was recorded by the teacher on a checklist chart. The observations were made daily at Site A1 and three times per week at sites A2 and B. These observations continued for a period of 12 weeks. In the targeted physical education classes, observations were made throughout the 30 minute class period. In the targeted third grade class, observations were made throughout the day.

Table 9 represents the results of the teacher checklist. Tally marks for each

month were totaled for each of the five targeted behaviors, then that number was divided by the total number of tallies for the 12 week intervention.

Table 9

Results of Teacher Checklist by Sites

Month	Not on Task	Not Listening	Lack of self control	Inability to Problem Solve	Not Encourage	Number of Negative Behaviors
Site A1						
Month 1	61%	53%	46%	47%	52%	539
Month 2	22%	22%	34%	29%	30%	402
Month 3	17%	25%	20%	24%	18%	201
Site A2						
Month 1	50%	55%	57%	56%	57%	169
Month 2	25%	23%	26%	25%	31%	76
Month 3	25%	22%	17%	19%	12%	62
Site B						
Month 1	39%	55%	33%	09%	34%	230
Month 2	31%	25%	35%	61%	33%	164
Month 3	30%	20%	32%	30%	33%	129

At all three sites, there was an improvement in the targeted social skills. The greatest improvement occurred between the first and second months at each site. At site A1, the negative measured behaviors decreased the most in the area of time on task, whereas self control showed the least amount of change. At site A2, the frequency of negative behaviors associated with encouragement decreased the most, while time on task displayed the least amount of change. At site B, the greatest

reduction in negative behaviors was evident in the area of listening, and encouragement showed the least amount of change. During the 12 week intervention, a fluctuation occurred in problem solving at site B. There was a 52% increase in the amount of negative behaviors between months one and two, and a decrease of 31% between months two and three. Overall, the number of recorded negative behaviors greatly decreased over the 12 week period at all three sites. The last form of documentation involved keeping anecdotal records.

Anecdotal Records

During the 12 week intervention, anecdotal notes were recorded by the researchers on the targeted third grade regular education students and the targeted fifth grade physical education students. These records were used as a method of documenting positive and negative social skill behaviors by students. The following is a monthly summary of the records.

Site A1. During the first month at site A1, six students had a particularly difficult time listening to the teacher's directions. They frequently asked to have directions repeated when it was time to be on task. Three students struggled with listening to other students when working in cooperative groups. They wanted to take over the group and complete it their way only. Eight students had trouble remaining on task. During cooperative group work, five of them fooled around and pulled the group off task instead of participating in the assignment. These same students had a hard time remaining on task during independent work time. Three students did not actively participate in group work, instead they sat like observers or day dreamed. Three students were unable to maintain self control while the class was involved in group discussions. These students called out answers in class or made inappropriate comments to draw attention to themselves. In the area of problem solving, one student cried just before lunch for six days during the month and asked to go to the nurse four

times. She was unable to handle friendship issues at recess. Rather than discuss the problem, she tried to escape. On two occasions, she met with a small group at recess to problem solve. Each time, the students were able to come to a consensus and resolved their issues. Two students had a fight during cooperative learning and refused to work together stating that they were enemies and hated each other. On the positive side, four students were outstanding leaders with social skills and set models for the other students.

The researcher continued to monitor social skills during the second month. Some of the students began to take control of their own behavior, but others continued to struggle with the same social skills. The same six students continued to have difficulty listening to the teacher's directions, but not as often. They tended to listen more carefully during math when the pace was faster and student involvement was increased. Two students continued to have difficulty listening to others during cooperative group work. One student who had previously wanted to take over the group, began to encourage others to participate and monitored the group for equal participation. Six students continued to have off-task behavior during independent work time. The researcher discovered that one of these students with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), was not eating breakfast and was sleeping less than eight hours. The researcher met with the parents and had a phone conference with the pediatrician in an effort to resolve this problem. Three students continued to joke around instead of participating in group activities. One student was still not actively involved with the activities in cooperative groups. This student whined or disagreed with all the ideas the other students presented. Two students who were previously not involved were now participating in group work. Three students were still having self control problems. They continued to call out answers, however, the inappropriate comments stopped. One of these three students had three incidents with name calling, two with

pushing in line, and one with wrestling another student at recess. The student who had been struggling to deal with friendship issues cried three times this month and went to the nurse once. She was able to work out two of her problems through the problem solving process. Due to the difficulty with remaining on task, listening to lessons and self control, the researcher began goal setting with the students. Within one week of setting personal goals, there was a drop in the number of negative behaviors recorded by the researcher during time on task. During story share time, the students began to give positive messages to each other. Spontaneous clapping was one way the students began showing their appreciation of the work of others. This contributed to building community in the classroom.

In the final intervention month, some additional changes were noted, but many of the same behaviors remained problematic. All six students struggling with listening skills continued to need additional help with listening to directions. However, during group work activities, all students worked cooperatively, remained on task and completed their assignments without any outstanding issues. The ADD student received a change of medication, ate breakfast and went to bed by 9:30. Two students continued to struggle with self control. As stated in previous months, they called out answers, but they continued to resist making inappropriate comments. The student who was name calling, pushing, and wrestling had one incident of performing a head lock on another student. The other behaviors ceased. The student dealing with friendship issues cried once and went to the nurse once. She met with a small group at recess and together they used the problem solving steps to come to a resolution. Two students modeled encouraging behavior by making positive comments about their partners and the accomplishments of others. This raised the awareness of using encouraging statements to build the confidence and self-esteem of others.

Site A2. During the 12 week intervention, anecdotal records were kept by the

researcher on the targeted fifth grade physical education class at site A2. The researcher documented 11 incidents of negative behaviors related to problem solving, conflict resolution, and listening during the month of September. During a football unit, students worked in groups of four, to teach football plays to one another. Each student was responsible for teaching a different aspect of the game to group members. One group of students spent the time arguing over who would go first and by the time they had come to a decision the class period was over. Another incident occurred during a game of touch football. One fifth grader attempted to control his group, play quarterback the entire time, and call all the plays. This was offensive to his teammates and a shouting match laced with inappropriate language ensued. Another incident involved name calling at the end of class. One team was overheard calling another team "cheaters". This display of poor sportsmanship towards peers provoked additional negative comments and behaviors. As a result, three students left the class in tears. These negative behaviors clearly indicated that problem solving and conflict resolution skills were still problematic among classmates. Students struggled with listening skills as well, during instruction, transition time and lesson wrap up. During one 30 minute period, the lesson was interrupted 12 times due to the class's inability to listen to the teacher.

Ten incidents were documented during the month of October, 8 of which were negative behaviors. These classroom examples demonstrate that the targeted fifth grade students continue to have difficulty staying on task, listening, maintaining self control, and lack the ability to resolve conflicts. One such incident involved fifth grade students during track and field. During this unit, students worked in pairs to complete an event worksheet. This assignment was due at the end of the week and involved participating in nine track and field events. After completing the event, students were to record their times and distances for each event. Students worked independently with

their partner but were expected to finish the assignment by Friday. Eight groups turned in this assignment with less than 30% of the worksheet completed. In addition, one pair of boys turned in a blank worksheet. Another example involved several boys that would not listen during teacher directed instruction. Despite a warning from the teacher, the boys continued to talk. Their inability to listen was so disruptive to the class that the boys were removed from physical education. The speedball unit also had its share of problems. Problem solving, encouragement and conflict resolution skills decreased considerably during game play. Two teams of boys disagreed about a score and as a result, the boys started pushing and shoving each other. The disagreement escalated, and it was necessary for the teacher to become involved in the dispute. In another speedball game, girls and boys verbally attacked each other. Once again, the disagreement was over the score and the conflicts went unresolved. Encouragement was problematic during game play as well. Students frustrated with other teammates would verbally put them down. During one game, two girls removed themselves from the activity so as not to be verbally abused by their classmates. In all three instances, students were unable maintain self control, problem solve, and resolve conflicts peaceably. In addition, the researcher documented that a substantial number of students struggled with listening skills during the month of October. On the average, the targeted fifth grade class lost 7-10 minutes of activity time each class period as a result of their inability to listen at appropriate times.

During the month of November, the researcher documented 5 negative behaviors and 8 positive behaviors. Several students continued to have difficulty with time on task whereas a more significant number struggled with listening skills. Two students in particular demonstrated an inability to remain on task during a two week jump rope unit. These boys used their time by chasing one another or just standing around talking. When it was time for testing, neither boy was ready. Listening skills

continued to be a problem for students at site A2. This was most evident during instruction, transitions, and at the end of class. Encouraging others, however, improved significantly. Encouraging remarks were heard by many children throughout the course of the jump rope unit as students mastered difficult jump rope tricks. In one instance, a fifth grade girl's encouraging words towards a peer gave him the incentive to master a very challenging jump rope trick he had worked on for several days. The incidence of unresolved conflicts decreased in November as well. For example, two boys that disliked one another were able to work out a disagreement during a running game that until then would have erupted in verbal attacks or unnecessary roughness. Furthermore, a sensitive fifth grade girl was able to assert herself with a peer in a situation filled with conflict without becoming rude or indignant. This positive behavior brought about a quick resolution between the girls and ended the conflict.

There were fewer negative behaviors during the month of December. Cooperative activities were implemented daily and the incidence of negative behaviors decreased considerably. A small number of student's negative behavior remained constant throughout the intervention. For example, the same boys struggled with self control and staying on task during the twelve weeks. In addition, two fifth grade boys continued to have difficulty with problem solving and conflict resolution. Only one fifth grade girl demonstrated a lack of self control consistently throughout the three month intervention. Listening skills improved during this month, however, the class continued to lose 5-7 minutes of activity time as a result of their inability to listen at appropriate times. The researcher documented several examples of positive social skills related to problem solving, self control and conflict resolution. For example, during the bowling unit a group of boys were involved in a dispute over the rules to Scotch Doubles. Without delay, the boys applied the negotiation steps, displayed on the wall, to work through the conflict and the problem was solved without the

assistance of the instructor. Furthermore, one fifth grade student removed himself from the class as a method of controlling his temper. After a cooling off period he rejoined the class on his own. Students enjoyed cooperative groups more often as their problem solving skills improved. In conclusion, occurrences of negative behaviors decreased and positive behaviors increased by the targeted students at site A2. Negative behaviors remained constant for just a small number of students. Listening continued to be the social skill that was most problematic for students and the most disruptive to classroom activities during the twelve week intervention.

Site B. Anecdotal records were documented at site B to demonstrate the areas of strengths and weaknesses in the various social skills that were implemented. During the month of September, the targeted fifth grade physical education class struggled with listening skills. At this time, the physical education class was involved in learning the skills of soccer and playing actual games. There were over 15 documented negative behaviors associated with listening skills. These negative behaviors include students talking while directions were being given by the teacher, and frequent occurrences of students picking the grass and putting it in other student's hair. Another trouble spot for the targeted students was self control. There were 10 documented negative behaviors in this area. One boy was observed slapping himself during the teacher's directions. Two other boys were seen physically tackling each other and arguing over who would be the goalie. One of the boys became so enraged that he threw the soccer ball and it hit an innocent bystander.

During the month of October, the lack of listening continued, and there was also an increase of negative behaviors observed in the areas of encouragement and time on task. There were eight observed negative behaviors dealing with encouragement. One student was angry with his football partner and called him an inappropriate name. Another boy screamed at his partner because he couldn't catch the football. A group

of girls were also observed displaying negative behaviors. They hurt a girl's feelings by telling her that they didn't want her in their group for football. Time on task was not as troublesome of an area, but 12 minor negative behaviors were observed. One girl waited until everyone was engaged in the activity for three minutes before she alerted the teachers that she didn't have a partner. Other girls had to be continuously reminded to stay on task instead of practicing their cheerleading and dance routines.

The targeted fifth grade students continued to have some difficulty with listening as well as problem solving in November. During the jump rope unit, students had problems deciding who should have the jump rope when they both picked up an end of it. Some students threw temper tantrums if they didn't get a certain color jump rope.

During the month of December, problems also arose during the tumbling unit. There were six negative behaviors observed related to problem solving. Students argued over sharing the mats and also didn't know how to practice their routine when their partner was absent. Students also fought over having a certain size and color ball in the basketball unit. Two boys were observed tugging at the same basketball and trying to kick each other to win possession of it. Overall, many of the negative behaviors that were observed were minor issues that could be resolved easily. Listening, by far, was the most troublesome area for the targeted fifth grade students. Students displayed improvement in all areas during the 12 week intervention. Student reflections were gathered as another means of documenting student progress and the success of the intervention.

Student Reflections

During the final week of the intervention, a social skill reflection was given to the students (See Appendix E). Students were asked to provide written responses regarding the positive, negative, and interesting aspects of the social skill instruction. In addition, they were asked if they were more aware of their strengths and

weaknesses in the targeted social skills more than they did at the beginning of the school year. Table 10 represents the results of the students' social skill awareness reflection.

Table 10

Results of Students Social Skill Awareness by Sites

	Site A1	Site A2	Site B
Percentage of Students With Heightened Awareness	74%	70%	72%

A substantial number of students at all three sites indicated that they became more aware of their social behaviors in the following areas: listening, encouraging, time on task, problem solving and self control. They were more conscious of their negative as well as their positive behaviors. In their written responses, students felt they had become better listeners, had fewer conflicts with classmates, were better able to problem solve, learned how to encourage one another and liked being encouraged. Students in the targeted physical education classes at site A2 and B felt that social skill instruction took too much time away from physical activities. Some interesting comments were shared by the students at all sites. They felt it helped to know how other people are feeling, that class meetings were helpful for problem solving, and that relationships were positively affected. The final method for documentation involved student goal setting.

Goal Setting

At Site A1, the students engaged in setting personal goals for improving social skills (Appendix C.) The goals lasted for one week and were reflected on by the students on a daily basis. The goals centered around improving on task behavior and listening skills. Some examples of the personal goals were: "listen to the teacher, to not call out answers, stop putting my feet under other people's desks, and listen to

what other people have to say." The final reflections were positive from all the students. Some responses were: "I did the best I ever did. I did a little better. Today I did a great job, and today was the BEST! I did really perfect because I remembered about it. I think I did the best I ever did in my life." This positive attitude was reflected in every response.

The students at Site A1 are seated in table groups of four or five. To help them improve their time on task, students worked on setting group goals such as, "Our goal is to finish our work and not talk." Again the students kept a daily record of their progress. Comments during the week varied from, "Terrific." to "We could have done better." By the end of the week, all groups indicated that they had improved. Setting goals helped the students be more aware of their own behavior.

In summary, by combining the results of the student survey, teacher checklist, anecdotal records, student reflections, and goal setting, the intervention appears to have had a positive impact on all targeted social skill behaviors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, the researchers believed the development of social skills during the intervention had a positive impact on peer relationships and the students' ability to work cooperatively in groups. As a result of direct social skill instruction, students' awareness of their social behaviors was heightened. The researchers believe this was exemplified through the student survey. When the initial survey given in the Fall was compared to the post survey, the researchers observed the percentages in the 'sometimes' category increased, while the 'most of the time' category decreased. This shift in student perspective may be a result of their heightened awareness of social skill behaviors. The social skills learned during cooperative group activities seem to have evolved and transferred to interpersonal relationships. As a result of learning negotiation and problem solving strategies, students were able to apply these

techniques to resolve conflicts. Therefore, the need for teacher intervention decreased. The use of open meetings allowed students to have ownership and have a large role in the development of classroom procedures and expectations. Open meetings provided a forum for the students to voice their concerns and offered the researchers insight as to which social skills needed to be revisited. Community building activities were instrumental in fostering a caring classroom where students felt comfortable and safe with one another. This was most noticeable in cooperative group activities where students were observed encouraging one another. Individual and group goal setting in the targeted third grade class had a positive impact on social skill behaviors. When the students were engaged in goal setting activities during the second month of the intervention, the number of negative behaviors for time on task declined dramatically.

Although the intervention was successful, prosocial behaviors decreased during competitive activities in both targeted physical education classes. As a result, the researches suggest emphasizing cooperative learning activities to foster the development of positive social skills. In addition, although listening skills improved during the intervention, the researchers feel this area remains problematic. Poor listening skills interferes with learning and the students' ability to follow through with a task. If teachers work in conjunction with one another and hold listening as a priority, there is a probability that there would be a greater increase in listening skills. This would provide a consistent message throughout the school.

The researchers endorse this intervention and would encourage others to implement a social skill intervention with these modifications in mind. Instructing students on five social skills was overwhelming. We would recommend teaching no more than three. Since conflict resolution and problem solving are so similar in nature, it is unnecessary to provide direct instruction in both. The physical education

teachers would recommend working in conjunction with the classroom teacher to ease the 30 minute time restrictions. Many students resented having their physical education time replaced by social skill instruction. Research indicates that a school wide social skill program would increase the effectiveness of social skill instruction (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Ward & Magnuson, 1995). The researchers are in agreement with the need for implementation of a school wide program to provide consistency for all students. In the regular education third grade classroom, goal setting increased positive social behavior. It is the opinion of the researchers that this strategy be implemented as an effective tool for empowering students and guiding them to take control of their own behavior. Finally, the researchers felt that they lacked materials and strategies that would have benefited in the instruction of listening skills. As with all of the social skills, staff development is essential for the effective teaching of listening skills.

The goal of this research project was to increase positive social skills in the third grade general education class and the fifth grade physical education classes. In order to achieve this goal, the main emphasis was on formal social skill instruction, cooperative learning, conflict resolution strategies, open classroom meetings for problem solving and decision making, and strengthening family/school connections. This intervention had a positive impact on the targeted population at the local sites. A lack of social skills is a national concern; therefore, this action plan is one strategy that can be effective in building positive behaviors in students. In summation, to address this issue, the educational system needs to implement social skill instruction as part of the daily curriculum.

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APPENDIX A

STAFF AND STUDENT SURVEYS

Dear Staff,

In our Master's program we are required to study and create an intervention in a problem area we have identified in our school. For our Action Research Project we have chosen to focus on social skills. To help us with our data collection we would appreciate it if you would take a few minutes to complete the following survey based on what you have obseverd this year. Please return to Liz Androjna's or Mary Ellen Barr's mailbox by Wednesday, September 15.

1) Do you teach lessons to help your students develop social skills? (specifically: listening, time on task, self control, problem solving and encouragement) Yes No Sometimes

2) In groups, do students actively listen to one another? Yes No Sometimes

3) Do you frequently need to refocus your students to the task at hand? Yes No Sometimes

4) Do your students demonstrate self control verbally and physically when confronted with a problem during the day? Yes No Sometimes

5) Are your students able to solve problems without your intervention? Yes No Sometimes

6) Do your students encourage one another when working in groups? Yes No Sometimes

7) Do you have students that show fatigue throughout the day? Yes No Sometimes

8) How often do you use cooperative learning? Daily Weekly Never

9) If you give rewards or awards do you give them to: individuals
small groups
entire class

Additional
Comments:_____

_____

_____.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Mary Ellen Barr
Liz Androjna
Jennifer Judkins

Student Survey

Please read each sentence below and think about yourself. Then decide how often you do the behavior and circle the answer. There are no right or wrong answers. just your feelings of how often you do these things. Answer all the questions

	Hardly Ever	Sometimes	Most Of The Time
1) Do I actively participate during group and team activities?	0	1	2
2) Do I listen to other's ideas without interrupting?	0	1	2
3) Do I follow the teacher's directions?	0	1	2
4) Do I say nice things to others when they have done something well?	0	1	2
5) Do I control my temper when I get angry?	0	1	2
6) Do I encourage classmates when they are struggling?	0	1	2
7) Do I think about the best way to solve a problem before I react to it?	0	1	2
8) Do I listen to teachers when they are talking to the class?	0	1	2
9) Do I disagree with classmates without arguing or fighting?	0	1	2
10) Do I listen to classmates when they are talking?	0	1	2
11) Do I talk things over with classmates when there is a problem or argument?	0	1	2
12) Do I work with group members without distracting them?	0	1	2

APPENDIX B

TEACHER CHECKLIST

GROUP OBSERVATION CHECKLIST FOR SOCIAL SKILLS

Class:_____

Targeted Social Skills

Check indicates the number of times each behavior is not observed.

Day of the Week					
Date:					
Listening					
Encouraging					
On Task					
Problem Solving					
Self Control					

Additional Comments:_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX C

STUDENT SOCIAL SKILL GOALS

Personal Social Skill Goal

Name_____

My goal for today and for the next week is to _____

_____

This is what I will do to accomplish this goal:_____

_____

This is how I am doing:

Monday: _____

_____

Tuesday: _____

_____

Wednesday: _____

_____

Thursday: _____

_____

Friday: _____

_____

Group Social Skill Goal

Our goal for today and for the next week is to _____

_____

This is what we will do to accomplish this goal:_____

_____

<u>This is how we are doing:</u>

Monday: _____

_____

Tuesday: _____

_____

Wednesday: _____

_____

Thursday: _____

_____

Friday: _____

_____

(If you need help with achieving your goal, you can meet with Mrs. Barr.)

Signed: _____

APPENDIX D

NEGOTIATION STATION

NEGOTIATION STATION

1. State what you <u>want</u>.

2. State how you <u>feel</u>.

3. State the <u>reasons</u> for your wants and feelings.

4. <u>Repeat</u> what the other person wants and feels, and their reasons.

5. <u>Brainstorm</u> 3 solutions to the problem.

6. <u>Choose</u> 1 solution and <u>shake hands</u>.

APPENDIX E

STUDENT SOCIAL SKILL REFLECTION

Name_____

Social Skill Reflection

P-

_____

M-

_____

I-

_____

Do you notice your strengths and weaknesses in these social skills **more** than you did at the beginning of the school year?